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AUTHOR Masters, Denise G.
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ABSTRACT

Public libraries have a responsibility toward all of their patrons, including home schoolers. "Home schooling" describes the situation where parents or guardians choose not to send their children to public or private schools, but instead educate their children themselves. Libraries are very important to home schoolers because, in most communities, public libraries are the only educational resources available to them. Public libraries can offer home schoolers services such as outreach, tours, programming, and collection development. Challenges associated with providing library services to home schoolers include: censorship (patrons' objections to material); subject wipe-out (when one family borrows all materials on a given subject); negative staff attitudes toward home schooling; time/energy demands; technology demands; and administrative limits. When enhanced with access to technology such as CD-ROMs or online resources, home schooling's emphasis on self-discipline and initiative can well prepare children for the workplace of the future, one of multi-abilities and multi-generations. Home schooled children may not have the same access to information as other children, but public libraries are in a position to help them. (Contains 14 references.) (SWC)

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An ERIC Digest

by Denise G. Masters

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ERIC DIGEST

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What Is Home Schooling?

The term *home schooling* is used to describe the situation where parents or guardians choose not to send their children to public or private schools, but prefer to educate their children by themselves, usually at home. According to Rieseberg (1995), common characteristics of home schooled families include the following:

- more than 50% have annual incomes of $25,000 to $55,000
- the parents have attended or graduated from college
- more than 90% are white/Anglo in racial/ethnic background
- more than 75% attend religious services
- the mother is the teacher
- learning is highly flexible and individualized
- instruction usually begins at age 5 1/2 and the children study at home for at least four years
- children are schooled three to fours hours per day and spend additional time in independent study
- many conventional subjects are studied with an emphasis on math, reading, and science

The reasons why parents decide to home school their children usually fall into two categories: ideological and pedagogical. The ideologues are usually religious fundamentalists who are unhappy with the public school's secular humanist curriculum, and the pedagogues are typically parents who are dissatisfied with the large classes, rigid curricula, and conformity found in traditional schools (Avner, 1989; Wikel, 1995). All states have compulsory education laws which make home schooling an option for parents (Lines, 1995).

Although most home schooled children eventually enter public school after a few years, they do comprise a significant number (Aiex, 1994). The Home School Legal Defense Association estimates that there are between 700,000 and 1 million children currently home schooled in the United States (Rieseberg, 1995). Over the next decade, up to 2 million children, or 5% of the total student population, could be home schooled (LaRue & LaRue, 1991). For example, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania "has seen a dramatic rise in the numbers of school-aged children—of various beliefs—who are being taught at home by their parents or other adults" (Lockwood, 1996).

Why Should Librarians Care?

Public libraries have a responsibility toward all of their patrons, including home schoolers (Avner, 1989). Public libraries also "have a rich tradition of supporting self-improvement and self-education," and "have sought to position themselves in the public's awareness as community resources for family literacy and lifelong learning" (Klipsch, 1995). Because in most communities, the only educational resource available to home schoolers is the public library, libraries are very important to them (Geist, Smith, & de la Pena McCook, 1994).

According to a survey of Ohio home school parents, 99% of them use the public library as an additional resource and 73% of them use the public library once a week or several times per week. Books, magazines, the librarian's help, video and audio tapes, reference books, and programs for children are the most widely used services (Schwartz, 1991). In 1993-94, Florida had 14,208 home schoolers, one of the largest numbers in the nation. The School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Florida perceived "the need to pool the ideas, talents and experiences of children's librarians" and later compiled their professional observations into a resource for other librarians who "are currently grappling with the challenge of how to serve the increasing number of their homeschooling patrons" (Geist et al., 1994).

Services for Home Schoolers

Public libraries can offer a myriad of services to home schoolers. These services can involve outreach, tours, programming, and collection development (LaRue & LaRue, 1991). Some specific suggestions compiled by Gatten (1994) include:

- allowing longer borrowing privileges
- showing respect toward home school patrons
- obtaining materials via interlibrary loan
- creating folders of information about state laws and names and addresses of home schooling organizations
- collecting curriculum guides from public schools
- inviting speakers
- conducting library tours
- offering instruction on using library resources
- compiling bibliographies on academic subjects
- displaying art and science projects
- attending meetings of home schooling organizations
- holding story hours
- setting up volunteer aide programs
- establishing a well-rounded collection which includes creationist and evolutionary materials as well as information on home schooling
- lending science equipment and computer hardware and software
- providing access to career and college information

- exhibiting at home schooling conferences
- sending informational packets about the library to home schooling organizations
- subscribing to home schooling journals

In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a bookmobile making up to 90 stops per month, provides library services to more than 800 rural and small town home schooled students. Curriculum and recreational materials are requested most, and sometimes the students call ahead to request nonfiction titles on subjects they are studying. By providing door-to-door service, bookmobile librarians learn the home schoolers' individual needs and screen and recommend resources for them. Technology is increasing bookmobile services as well—many have online card catalogs, cellular telephones, fax machines, and other high-tech features. Automation makes checkout easier and more efficient, and users have quick access to many types of books and research materials (Lockwood, 1996).

Some Concerns

Librarians have noted certain challenges associated with providing services for home schoolers. Madden (1991) found the following areas to be problematic: (1) censorship: patrons' objections to materials on evolution, the occult, and age ratings; (2) subject wipe-out: one family checks out all of the materials on a certain subject; (3) negative staff attitudes toward home schooling: staff comments and beliefs about child abuse, lack of socialization, and poor quality; (4) time/energy demands: too many requests for service; (5) technology demands: too many requests for software and hardware; and (6) administrative limits: demand for a lot of personalized service. Other problems include an adherence to out-of-print booklists, "mountains" of materials needed "yesterday," unique programs and services offered to home schoolers that do not get a response, unsupervised children in the library, requests for curriculum materials and textbooks, and difficulty identifying the home schooling families (Geist et al., 1994; Brostrom, 1995). Brostrom (1995) states that a fruitful partnership between home schoolers and librarians is possible, but that it is vital for them "to openly discuss materials selection, intellectual freedom, balanced collections, [and] censorship."

Conclusion

The mixed-age, mixed-ability environment of home schooling is similar to the workplace environment more than it is to the single-grade classroom. The workplace of the 21st century will be one of multi-abilities and multi-generations—a place where students who conform with their peers will struggle to compete, while students who develop personal expertise and independence will find opportunities. Advances in technology have created a virtual workplace and have made people who telecommute and manage home-based businesses a large and growing part of the work force. The trend toward telecommuting is compatible with two skills encouraged in home schooling—self-discipline and initiative. When enhanced with access to technology such as CD-ROMs or online resources, home schooling can well prepare children for the workplace of the future (Rieseberg, 1995).

Home schooled children may not have the same access to information as other children, and libraries are in a position to help them. Enhanced services could be offered to them (Hunt, 1996). If home schooled children do not have access to computers with modems at home, they could go to a public library that provides Internet access (Brostrom, 1995). "Libraries are an important part of home schooled children's lives, and it only makes sense that the acceptance and positive recognition these children deserve should begin there" (Hunt, 1996).

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